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Viewing cable 06AMMAN7420, JORDAN'S ISLAMISTS BACK DOWN, FOR NOW

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06AMMAN7420	2006-09-27 14:33	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Amman

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2016
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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S ISLAMISTS BACK DOWN, FOR NOW

REF: A. AMMAN 6724
[1](#)B. AMMAN 6335
[1](#)C. AMMAN 5907
[1](#)D. AMMAN 5879 AND PREVIOUS

¶E. AMMAN 5222
¶F. AMMAN 1692 AND PREVIOUS
¶G. AMMAN 809

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: After ten months of tension between the GOJ and Jordan's legal Islamist movement, advocates for confrontation appear to have lost the debate within the movement's leadership. Some in the leadership are confident of gains in 2007 elections; others worry that more Jordanians are growing tired of the movement's non-violent tactics. End summary.

The Dispute

¶2. (C) Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, and its political wing the Islamic Action Front, complain the GOJ has been pressuring them since late 2004. Their most prominent grievance was the conviction, imprisonment, and expulsion from parliament of Front MPs Muhammad Abu Fares and Ali Abu Al-Sukar on charges of incitement for statements they made after the death of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi in June (ref C). Islamists also point to the security services' attempt to influence their internal elections (ref F); a press campaign to link the movement to alleged Hamas arms caches in Jordan; a roundup of activists in April; the government's takeover of the movement's large charity network because of alleged corruption (ref D); and a recent further tightening of government control over mosque sermons (septel.)

¶3. (C) For its part, senior GOJ officials have worried that the movement -- Jordan's only effective non-governmental political organization of any magnitude -- was drifting away from its traditional role as a loyal opposition, and that the younger, Palestinian-Jordanian base of the movement was displacing the East Banker, old guard leadership. Hamas' electoral victory in January, and an exultant Front MP's claim that Jordan's Islamists were also "ready to govern" (ref G), shocked and provoked the security establishment. COMMENT: After the Hamas election, the King directed GID to put the movement back in its place, and to reduce the influence of the Front's Secretary General Zaki Bani Irsheid, whom the security services viewed as the champion of Hamas admirers within the movement. While Bani Irsheid's base in

the movement is among Palestinian-Jordanians, Bani Irsheid is of East Bank origin. END COMMENT.

Hawks vs. Doves, and a Hizballah Factor

¶4. (C) Government pressure on the Islamists touched off a debate within the movement's leadership between so-called "hawks" advocating confrontation with the government, and "doves" counseling patience. The debate broke down largely along West Banker-East Banker lines. According to contacts close to the movement's leadership, some hawks worried that Hizballah has become so popular in Jordan this summer that the Brotherhood and Front looked ineffective in comparison. Hawks also voiced concerns that disillusioned supporters would drop out of the movement unless it confronted the government with strikes or withdrawal from parliament.

¶5. (C) Despite these concerns, and with some help from the security services, the dovish old guard prevailed, and publicly re-asserted its leadership over that of Bani Irsheid. On July 11, Brotherhood leaders (without Bani Irsheid) met with the Prime Minister and issued a conciliatory statement (ref E), prompting hawks to push back with calls for the Front's MPs to walk out of parliament. On September 6, Muslim Brotherhood leader Salem Al-Falahat announced that the Front's fifteen remaining MPs would not walk out of parliament over the 13-month sentences imposed on Abu Fares and Abu al-Sukkar.

¶6. (C) Although a walkout and strikes are now off the table,

rhetorical attacks on the government continue. Both hawks and doves in the Brotherhood press populist themes in public, criticizing the government for allegedly muzzling free speech, for corruption, and for "dishonorable subservience" to the U.S. and Israel (ref D). Falahat's interviews with Arab satellite channels are full of fiery denunciations of "the Zionist and American enemy," though his statements in domestic Jordanian media are more restrained. Bani Irsheid bashed the government September 27, according to local media, for its continued hold on the movement's charity network. (Note: The GOJ replaced the board of directors of the Brotherhood's charity network with non-MB members shortly after the arrest of the Front MPs, claiming it needed to root out corruption in the network (ref D). The government-appointed chairman of the interim board told polcouns September 19 that he did not expect the GOJ's ongoing investigation to uncover any serious wrongdoing, and opined that the episode was part of a government campaign to pressure the movement, which it was.)

Electoral Prospects

¶7. (C) Post contacts close to the movement say old guard East Bankers argued successfully that time was on the movement's side. Jordanian public opinion, claimed the "doves", was more sympathetic than ever to criticism of Jordan's elite for corruption and proximity to the U.S. The "doves" expect this sentiment to bring the Front big gains at the municipal and parliamentary elections expected in 2007.

¶8. (C) However, these contacts also said Falahat himself - and other old-guard leaders - complain privately that Jordan's political system is so irretrievably corrupt that disillusioned voters will increasingly disengage from conventional politics. (Comment: Complaints from Islamists and other oppositionists about corruption and manipulation of the electoral process are nothing new, but, assuming our contacts' accounts are accurate, given the current sour popular mood (ref B) it's surprising that Falahat is not more upbeat about next year's elections. End comment.)

Conclusion

¶9. (C) The Muslim Brotherhood's apparent decision to eschew for now further confrontation with the government is a welcome victory for the GOJ and its security services. Many in Jordan hope the government will reciprocate with a royal pardon for Abu Fares and Abu Al-Sukkar, though there have been no recent hints of this from the Palace. Both the government and the movement's leaders should worry if significant numbers of Jordanians have indeed lost patience with conventional politics and the non-violent tactics of the Brotherhood and the Front.

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Hale